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Approaching organisational analysis: towards a critical perspective

> No matter what you have to do with an organization—whether you are going to study it, work in it, consult for it, subvert it, or use it in the interests of another organisation—you must have some view of the nature of the beast with which you are dealing. This constitutes a perspective on organizations (Perrow 1970, p. 1).

Although the study of organisations is sometimes viewed as a secondary concern in social and welfare work, this is not the case in the social sciences as a whole. Organisations are a major focus of inquiry in the social sciences, and organisation theory is a primary concern of sociologists, psychologists, political scientists and economists, as well as specialists in applied fields such as management and public administration. The study of organisations has a long history and, particularly in the last two decades, has become central to many areas of social inquiry. It has been claimed that 'the study of organisations must be at the core of all social science' (Perrow 1986, p. vii). Our argument for the centrality of organisational knowledge and skills in social and welfare work runs parallel to this emphasis in the social sciences as a whole.

The attention paid to organisation theory in the social sciences is both helpful and difficult for social and welfare workers. On the positive side, there is no shortage of materials from which workers can build and develop their understanding of organisations. However, finding a way through the morass of competing perspectives, frameworks and theories can be daunting. This chapter provides assistance in this task. Firstly, it overviews the development of organisation theory and some of the main perspectives on organisational analysis. The purpose of this overview is to enable workers to recognise the main sources of ideas about organisations, and

to be able to critically appraise the assumptions, strengths and weaknesses of the various perspectives. There have been many previous summaries of the development of organisation theory (e.g. Clegg and Dunkerley 1980; Hasenfeld 1983, pp. 12-49; Mouzelis 1975; Perrow 1986). Our approach is distinctive in that we directly address the question: what bearing do the various perspectives on organisation theory have for social and welfare work?

Secondly, the chapter lays the groundwork for workers to develop their own critical perspective on organisations. By this we mean an ability to analyse organisations in terms that go beyond 'received' beliefs and opinions or official statements. We consider this to be a fundamental part of becoming an effective worker in organisations.

Perspectives on organisational analysis

The influence of organisations on individuals and social relations in late-twentieth century industrialised, urbanised societies is profound. It is through organisations that goods and services are produced and distributed, that political interests are aggregated and expressed, that cultural and recreational pursuits are conducted, and that societal functions such as socialisation and social control are exercised. This has led some writers to describe contemporary societies as 'organisational societies' (e.g. Presthus 1978; Sosin 1980). Etzioni conveys the pervasiveness of organisations in our social life thus:

> We are born in organizations, educated by organisations, and most of us spend our lives working for organizations. We spend much of our leisure time paying, playing and praying in organisations. Most of us will die in an organization, and when the time comes for burial, the largest organization of all—the state—must grant official permission (1964, p. 1).

The centrality of organisations in our social life has led to a large body of literature aiming to understand their role, how they function, and how their operation can be improved. However, this has not resulted in the emergence of one uniform, commonly accepted body of theory. Rather, the study of organisations is characterised by many, competing orientations and perspectives, which sometimes complement and sometimes contradict one another. In the material which follows, we examine ten of the most important of these perspectives:

1 the theory of bureaucracy;
2 scientific management;
3 human relations;
4 systems and ecological perspectives;
5 decision perspectives;

6 market perspectives;
7 neo-Marxian perspectives;
8 political economy perspectives;
9 feminist perspectives;
10 Aboriginal perspectives.

The theory of bureaucracy

Social and welfare workers often use the terms 'bureaucracy' and 'organisation' interchangeably, and conceive their work as taking place in 'welfare bureaucracies' (e.g. Howe 1986). What must be recognised is that this formulation is based on a particular view of the nature of organisations. Use of the term 'bureaucracy' can be traced back to the mid-eighteenth century (Albrow 1970, pp. 16-18). However, its systematic use in organisation theory stems from the writings of Max Weber (1864–1920). Weber's writings are broad-ranging, being concerned with explanations of the overall changes that took place in European societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular industrialisation and the rise of the capitalist economy (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, pp. 33-41, 75-82). These historical circumstances, Weber observed, saw the emergence of bureaucracy as the dominant form of organisation in modern societies. Weber's concept of bureaucracy was based on his ideas about the nature of power, domination and authority. He was particularly concerned with the nature of authority, that is the belief in the legitimacy of commands and orders, and consequently the likelihood of obedience.

According to Weber, three types of authority can be distinguished: traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal–rational authority (Etzioni-Halevy 1985, p. 27). Traditional authority is that which is legitimated by its existence over time, the sanctity of tradition. Charismatic authority is based on the outstanding characteristic of an individual: people obey because of the exceptional sanctity, heroism, character or other personal qualities of the person issuing commands. Legal–rational authority is legitimated and exercised by virtue of being in accordance with rules and procedures that are accepted by those concerned. People obey because they accept that those who have attained certain positions according to laid down rules and procedures have a legitimate right to issues commands and expect compliance.

Weber argued that the predominance of legal–rational authority as the basis of the power relationship between rulers and the ruled is a central feature of modern societies. These relations are manifested in organisational structures that have certain typical characteristics. Bureaucracy is the term he used to describe the form of organisation corresponding to and based on legal–rational authority. The main characteristics of the legal–rational, bureaucratic type of organisation, as listed by Mouzelis, are:

- a high degree of specialisation;
- a hierarchical authority structure with limited areas of command and responsibility;
- impersonality of relations between organisational members;
- recruitment of officials on the basis of ability and technical knowledge;
- differentiation of private and official income and fortune.

Mouzelis argues that these characteristics are linked by a common element: 'the existence of a system of control based on rational rules, rules which try to regulate the whole organisational structure and process on the basis of technical knowledge and with the aim of maximum efficiency' (1975, p. 39).

Bureaucracy, in this sense, is not a wholly modern or Western phenomenon. For example, many of the features of legal–rational bureaucracy were present at various stages in ancient Egyptian, Roman and Chinese state administrations, and in the Roman Catholic Church from the late thirteenth century (Etzioni-Halevy 1985, p. 29). Moreover, few, if any, modern organisations are wholly bureaucratic, in the sense of exhibiting the characteristics of bureaucracy in pure form. However, it was Weber's argument that bureaucratic forms of organisation proliferated and extended into many spheres of social life as a consequence of the circumstances of modern societies. These circumstances included the creation of a money economy, the emergence of capitalist economies, the trend towards rationality in Western society, the development of democratic political institutions, rapid population growth, modern forms of communication and the emergence of especially complex administrative problems in the modern state (Etzioni-Halevy 1985, pp. 30-31). Bureaucracy developed, in short, because it was an efficient tool to deal with the tasks and circumstances of complex, modern society:

> The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organisation has always been its purely technical superiority . . . The fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organisations exactly, as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production (Weber, quoted in Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, p. 80).

Although Weber argued that bureaucratic forms of organisation were the most efficient in dealing with the tasks facing modern societies and the modern state, he by no means espoused an uncritical view of bureaucracy. He was concerned about the impact of bureaucracy on the individual, seeing it as inherently dehumanising and producing 'specialists without spirit' (Weber, quoted in Etzioni-Halevy 1985, p. 32). He was also concerned about the political implications of the growth of bureaucracy. The qualities that made bureaucracy so essential to modern society also resulted in the possibility of immense power being concentrated in the hands of bureaucratic organisations,

and difficulties in holding bureaucracies, and particularly their managerial elites, to account.

Weber's elaboration of the concept of bureaucracy holds a central place in organisation theory. Most introductions to twentieth century analysis of organisations begin, as we have done, by reviewing Weber's ideas. The strength of Weber's analysis stems in large part from its breadth: he provides explanation, description and critique of modern organisations and their place in society. His ideas have, however, been subject to extensive criticism.

The first main line of criticism concerns the idea that bureaucracy is the most efficient form of organisation. The critics suggest that, far from being the most efficient means of getting the work of society done, bureaucracy is inherently inefficient. The emphasis in the bureaucratic mode on precision and reliability in administration has self-defeating consequences. Officials become excessively prudent, rules become ends in themselves, hierarchies slow decision-making, change is resisted and relations are conducted in an excessively impersonal fashion. Collectively, such behaviour has been referred to as 'bureaupathology' (Smith 1979, p. 27). It is further argued that while bureaucratic organisational forms may be suitable for certain routine tasks, they are entirely inappropriate for creative or non-routine activities. For example, it is argued that much of the work in human services is non-routine, requiring complex judgements and sensitivity to consumer needs. In these circumstances hierarchy and rigid rules inhibit, rather than advance, the effectiveness of the organisation.

A related view is that Weber focused almost exclusively on the formal elements of organisational structure, ignoring the pervasive influence of informal relations within organisations. The behaviour of officials is influenced by many factors additional to the administrative code, including his or her individual interests, prejudices, fears and friendships (Albrow 1970, pp. 55-56). 'Bureaucracy's other face' includes informal relations, informal norms and values, an informal power hierarchy and informal power struggles (Etzioni-Halevy 1985, p. 35).

Workers seeking to understand the organisations in which they are located need to come to grips with Weber's theory of bureaucracy. Arguments that attribute the ills of society wholly or partially to bureaucratic features of organisations such as hierarchy, prescribed rules, specialisation, and impersonality of relations have wide currency. These characteristics of bureaucratic organisations are certainly problematic, and require critical analysis. However, dealing with the question of bureaucracy involves far more than criticising hierarchy, rules and so forth.

Firstly, Weber's arguments about bureaucratic efficiency need to be given full consideration. Undoubtedly, many examples of bureaupathology can be found, but whether this represents a decisive

argument against bureaucratic organisation must be questioned. For example, consider the administration of the social security system. The tasks of assessing the eligibility of individuals for pensions and benefits, ensuring that payments are made on time, and monitoring and controlling the whole process is currently undertaken by an organisation that has many of the characteristics of a bureaucracy—the Department of Social Security. Many criticisms can be levelled at this organisation, and the policies it implements. However, given the task of processing claims for many millions of dollars every week, on behalf of several million people, in a large country, is there a viable alternative to an extensive body of rules and regulations, a hierarchical structure to maintain control, and an impersonal (in the sense of not favouring or discriminating against individuals on the basis of racial, gender, regional or ethnic characteristics) approach?

Similar issues can be raised about many other human service tasks, although the extent to which a service is relatively routine (such as processing social security payments) or relatively non-routine (such as marriage counselling) is an important variable. The key point to consider is whether human services can be provided effectively, efficiently, equitably, and in an accountable manner, other than through organisations that have some bureaucratic features.

Workers also need to understand the significance of Weber's emphasis on the importance of legal–rational authority in modern societies and organisations. Legal–rational authority is a basic and characteristic feature of almost all organisations in which workers are likely to be employed: in this sense, almost all workers are located in bureaucracies. Understanding the nature and bases of authority is important for social and welfare workers who are themselves both subject to and part of the authority systems of organisations.

Finally, Weber's concerns about the concentration of power in bureaucracies and the difficulties of holding bureaucracies to account are highly relevant to those in the human services who are concerned with the power that bureaucratic organisations exercise over consumers and the society as a whole. It may be that developing means of controlling the power of bureaucratic organisations is a more relevant and pressing concern than bureaucratisation as such. As Perrow suggests:

> When we attribute the ills of organizations and those of our society to the bureaucratization of large-scale organizations, as we are so wont to do, we may be only fooling ourselves . . . The presence of hierarchy, rules, division of labor, tenure provisions, and so on can hardly be blamed for maladministration or abuses of social power . . . Critics, then, of our organisational society . . . had best turn to the key issue of who controls the varied forms of power generated by organizations, rather than flail away at the windmills of bureaucracy (1986, pp. 46-47).

Scientific management

Weber wrote about the causes and consequences of the dominance of bureaucratic organisation in the early twentieth century, although it was not until mid-century that his work was translated into English and gained currency in the English speaking world. Meanwhile, an extensive and influential body of writing about organisations had developed, particularly in the United States. The first dominant perspective to emerge was scientific management, the principles of which were enunciated by Frederic W. Taylor in 1911. Scientific management was a response to the needs of the managers and owners of industrial enterprises in the United States to increase productivity and profits, and exercise control over labour (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, pp. 82-86). While Weber's perspective was broad-ranging and concerned with social explanation and analysis, scientific management was narrowly focused on the needs and concerns of the managers of industry. Taylor, whose background was in mechanical engineering, essentially approached organisations as machines requiring careful design and fine-tuning. He argued that there was always one best way to perform any task or industrial process, and that this could be discovered by scientific observation and experiment. His view was that through time and motion studies, and careful study of job techniques and work processes, industrial production could become more efficient and management could become a truly scientific activity (Mouzelis 1975, pp. 79-83).

Underlying Taylorism were a number of important assumptions about the nature of organisations and the purposes of organisation theory. His model of organisation as machine assumed that there were no inherent conflicts between management and workers, or among any other groups in the organisation. Taylor saw trade unions as unnecessary because workers and management shared common interests. He also assumed that workers were motivated essentially by financial rewards and that their attitude to work was essentially instrumental; psychological and sociological aspects of the worker were largely ignored in Taylor's organisation theory. Taylor sharply distinguished between management, who had responsibility for planning, organising, supervising and making decisions, and workers, who were viewed essentially as adjuncts to the industrial machinery and as being without knowledge of organisational goals and processes. The role of management theory, as Taylor presented it, was to assist the former to organise and control the latter, in order to maximise productivity.

Closely related to the theories of scientific management are the writings often collectively referred to as the 'formal theories of administration' or 'classical management theory'. While Taylor was concerned primarily with the organisation of work on the factory floor,

Fayol, Gulick and Urwick and other formal theorists directed their attentions to the overall structure of organisations. Writing mainly in the inter-war period, they developed principles that, they argued, should guide organisational design. These included precepts such as the importance of the division of labour (the assumption that the more people specialise, the more efficient they will be), unity of command (each employee should receive direction for a particular operation from only one person), clear lines of authority, span of control (limits on the number of people to be supervised by one person) and the division of work according to established principles (that is by purpose, place, person or consumer or process) (Mouzelis 1975, pp. 87-96; Stoner, Collins and Yetton 1985, pp. 44-51).

Why should social and welfare workers concern themselves with these theories of organisation developed over fifty years ago mainly in the context of industrial management? The reason is that the aspirations and approach underlying the scientific management and classical management perspectives continue to be important influences on managerial thinking and behaviour, and on the operation of contemporary human service organisations. Organisation theory has developed, not by way of earlier theories being superseded by newer perspectives, but rather by way of additional ingredients being added to the existing concoction. While some elements of Taylorism, for example its theory of human motivation, have been largely superseded, the basic notion of viewing organisations as machines requiring careful design and fine-tuning is still influential, alongside other perspectives.

This influence has been particularly felt in public sector organisations during the last two decades. In this period, revised versions of scientific management have become fashionable in public administration, including human service administration. Workers in many organisational contexts find that their tasks and roles are shaped to a not inconsiderable degree by demands for performance measurement, programme budgeting, corporate planning, programme evaluation, outcome standards, effectiveness review, systems management, efficiency audit, management information systems, management by objectives, and so on. Patti refers to such management techniques as 'the new scientific management', arguing that they reflect the historical concerns of scientific management with rationalising organisational structures and processes to achieve efficiency and effectiveness (1978). Fabricant has argued that fiscal restraint and the dominance of Taylorist principles during the 1980s has led to the industrialisation of social work, that is its transformation from a craft activity to a form of repetitive, routinised people-processing (1985, p. 394). In the Australian public administration literature, commitment to the value of such techniques has been dubbed 'managerialism' (Considine 1988; Paterson 1988). The implications of managerialism for social and welfare workers are considered in detail in chapter 11.

Dominant values in social and welfare work sometimes lead workers to resile from viewing organisations in mechanistic terms. But if human service organisations are viewed in part as instruments to achieve certain desired social purposes, then it can be strongly argued that their effectiveness and efficiency are relevant and legitimate concerns. However, an unqualified mechanistic view of organisations is inadequate, viewed either from a managerial or a broader social science perspective. Mechanistic perspectives on organisations tend to treat organisational goals as unambiguous and mutually compatible, which is often not the case in human service organisations. They also tend to erroneously assume common goals and interests among organisational participants, and ignore or down-play their complexity of motives and aspirations. Organisations may, for some purposes, be usefully viewed as machines, but they are not only machines. Knowledge of other perspectives which draw attention to the complexity of social relations in organisations is also required.

Human relations

The prescriptions of Taylor and early scientific management were directed by a concern to maximise productivity and profits, maintain control over workers, and generally promote efficiency and effectiveness. These remain fundamental concerns of much organisation and management theory. However, in the mid-twentieth century the dominant position of scientific management was challenged by the human relations perspective.

The human relations approach emerged out of dissatisfaction with scientific management's theory of human motivation. Conventional accounts of the origins of human relations stress the importance of the experiments conducted in the 1920s in a factory of the Western Electric Company in Hawthorne, an area of Chicago (Etzioni 1964, pp. 32-41). The Hawthorne experiments, as they became known, were initially concerned with the relation between the physical working environment, for example lighting and worker productivity. However, their findings led the researchers to conclude that the key variables influencing output were not physical, but social. The researchers also concluded that social psychological factors were of greater significance than monetary rewards in motivating workers. Although more recently there has been considerable questioning of the methodology and interpretation of the Hawthorne experiments (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, pp. 129-130; Perrow 1986, pp. 79-85), the central notion underpinning these studies—that social and psychological factors are crucial determinants of productivity—has sustained a great deal of the organisation and management theory written from the 1930s to the present day.

The human relations approach to the understanding of organisations can be summarised in terms of two main propositions.

The first is the need to distinguish between the formal and the informal structure and functioning of an organisation. The focus in scientific management and, in a different way, Weber's bureaucratic theory was predominantly on the formal aspects of organisations—rules, division of work, hierarchy and so forth. Human relations writers, by contrast, emphasise topics such as leadership styles, morale, and group interactions and relationships. Organisations, they argue, cannot be understood solely in terms of what appears on the organisation chart: the informal human relations in an organisation are critical determinants of organisational processes and outcomes.

There can be no argument in general terms about the need to understand and take account of social relations in organisations. This was an innovative idea in the 1920s and 1930s and is now accepted as commonplace. This fact alone testifies to the lasting influence of writers in the human relations tradition. However, the second main proposition that emerges from the writings of the human relations school is more contentious. Many human relations proponents present an ideal model of organisation and management, involving a perfect balancing of organisational goals and workers' needs. The task of management, as they see it, is to develop organisational structures and processes according to the supposed social and psychological needs of workers, so that workers thereby become more committed to organisational goals and to increasing effectiveness and efficiency (Holland and Petchers 1987, p. 206). In this approach, human beings are assumed to have a high capability for creativity and personal growth and to be strongly motivated by a desire for self-expression and self-actualisation (e.g. Argyris 1971). These qualities tend to be stifled, it is argued, by formal, bureaucratic organisations. Therefore, what is required is a more facilitative work and organisational environment, characterised by group participation in decision-making, and leadership styles that are democratic, permissive and considerate. Worker autonomy and participative management are key themes, and a wide range of organisational change techniques have been developed based on the human relations perspective, including T-groups, sensitivity training, survey feedback and other organisational development (OD) methods.

This model of management has often been stated in terms that sharply distinguish so-called classical management theory and the human relations approach. A good example is the dichotomy that has been drawn by McGregor, a prominent human relations theorist, between Theory X and Theory Y. Theory X, McGregor suggests, is the 'traditional view of direction and control' in organisations. This approach assumes that human beings have an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if they can. As a consequence, it is held that most people need to be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment to get them to put effort into achieving organisational goals. An implicit assumption is that people prefer to be directed, wish to avoid responsibility, have little ambition, and want security above all

else. Most organisations, McGregor argued, make Theory X assumptions.

In contrast, Theory Y is based on 'the integration of individual and organisational goals'. It assumes that the expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest, and that people will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which they are committed. Human beings can learn, under proper conditions, to accept and seek responsibility, and managers should be constantly striving to utilise the human potentialities of organisational members (McGregor 1971).

The approach and prescriptions of the human relations school have considerable intuitive and ideological appeal to many workers. The optimistic value system and view of humanity, the emphasis on co-operation, participation and consensus, and the prominence given to interpersonal relations are all consonant with values widely held by social and welfare workers. While scientific management makes organisations sound like machines, human relations makes them sound like families or communities, far more familiar phenomena for social and welfare workers.

Undoubtedly, the prescriptions and insights of writers in this tradition are often helpful, and there can be no questioning of the importance of paying attention to the needs of the individuals that comprise an organisation. But how adequate is the human relations perspective as an overall framework for understanding the nature of organisations and organisational life?

Firstly, it needs to be stressed that while the focus of the human relations approach is, at first sight, on the needs of workers, the central concerns are traditional management issues, namely, productivity and control. The human relations approach, like scientific management before it, assumes or asserts that there is no fundamental conflict of interests between management and workers, or among any other groups or factions within the organisation. The message is that if everyone co-operates, everyone wins. This assumption of basic, common interests and goals within organisations is strongly challenged by other perspectives, which consider it to be manipulative. For example, group processes, consultation and participative mechanisms can be, and often are, used by managers as essentially symbolic activities. Induction programmes, socialisation processes and attempts to manufacture a 'corporate culture' are all management strategies that have as one central purpose the maximising of control. Clegg and Dunkerley argue that the main contribution of human relations theorists has been to 'produce a highly developed ideological apparatus of normative control . . . for the management of organisations' (1980, p. 135).

In addition, major questions have been raised about the major tenets of the human relations approach. The supposed empirical

relationship between worker satisfaction and the quality and quantity of organisational outputs has not survived close scrutiny (for a trenchant critique see Perrow 1986, pp. 79-110). The quality of human relations in an organisation is no doubt a factor in effectiveness and productivity, although what constitutes 'good' human relations is an issue for debate. But other influences on effectiveness include the clarity of technology and procedures, the level of organisational resources and staff competency, economic reward structures, accountability procedures, and the quality of facilities and equipment, to name a few. Thus, a major difficulty with the human relations school is its narrow focus and concerns, and its implicit assumptions of the shared interests of all organisational participants.

Table 2.1 draws together the main propositions, discussion questions and implications of the three perspectives examined so far in the chapter. Bureaucratic theory, scientific management and human relations, although representing competing perspectives, can be viewed as the basic building blocks of twentieth century organisation theory. The issues they raise—authority, formal structure and human motivations and relationships—are fundamental elements in any comprehensive theory of organisations. However, other key dimensions need to be added to the picture.

Systems and ecological perspectives

Most contributors to the scientific management and human relations schools wrote from a managerial perspective. Their main concerns were productivity and efficiency. The emergence of systems perspectives on organisations in the 1950s and 1960s re-introduced a broader sociological focus. The systems view of organisations emerged from themes and perspectives then dominant in American sociology, particularly structural functionalism and general systems theory (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, pp. 171-212). Underlying the systems perspective is a biological analogy:

> Social institutions, in much the same way as organisms, have needs of survival and adaptation to their environment which they satisfy by means of a particular pattern of interdependence between their parts. Viewed as Natural Systems, organisations are composed of an inter-related series of processes: it is the inter-relationship and the process . . . which should constitute the object of study (Silverman 1970, p. 27).

Whereas in scientific management the organisation is perceived as a machine, and in human relations a family, in systems theory the organisation is perceived as an organism.

The idea of viewing organisations in systems terms has considerable relevance for social and welfare workers. This perspective brings into focus three key issues: the emphasis on interdependency in

Table 2.1 Implications of bureaucratic theory, scientific management and human relations perspectives for social and welfare workers

Propositions	*Questions*	*Implications*
	BUREAUCRACY	
1 Legal–rational authority is fundamental to power relations in modern societies	1 Is bureaucracy necessary for efficient and equitable service provision?	1 Understand the nature of authority in organisations
2 Bureaucracy is the organisational form corresponding to legal–rational authority	2 Do writers on bureaucracy ignore informal processes in organisations?	2 Consider the relations between bureaucracy, efficiency and effectiveness
		3 Be concerned with harnessing and controlling the power of bureaucracies
	SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT	
1 Organisations can be thought of as machines requiring fine-tuning	1 Whose interests is scientific management concerned with?	1 Be aware of formal organisational structures and processes
2 Formal structures and processes are critical to organisational functioning	2 Does it ignore informal processes and conflicting interests?	2 Be concerned with issues of efficiency and effectiveness
	3 Does it have an adequate theory of human motivation?	3 Be able to critique and respond effectively to contemporary 'managerialist' demands
	HUMAN RELATIONS	
1 Social and psychological factors are important in organisations	1 Whose interests are served by human relations theories?	1 Be aware of informal relations in organisations
2 It is important to distinguish formal and informal processes in organisations	2 What is the relationship between worker satisfaction and effectiveness?	2 Develop effective informal relations with other organisational participants
3 Organisations should be designed to meet the social psychological needs of workers		3 Understand the assumptions underlying human relations techniques

organisations, the idea of organisational needs, and the significance of organisational environment.

Fundamental to the systems approach is its stress on the interdependence of the various elements and units that comprise the organisation. This means that the internal operations and processes of an organisation should be viewed as

> a network of interacting, overlapping, conflicting or co-operating sub-systems or interdependent parts, each part receiving something from others, influenced by the behaviour of others, and itself behaving in ways which have consequences both for other sub-systems and for the organisation as a whole (Warham 1977, p. 72).

What this suggests to workers is that their actions and decisions are inextricably bound up with the actions of other organisational members and the overall organisation. They, in common with all other organisational participants, are not independent operators.

This proposition at first sight may appear unremarkable. However, this notion of interdependency challenges some widely held views in social and welfare work. Social work and organisations are sometimes portrayed dichotomously as having only conflicting or divergent interests. This is sometimes expressed in terms of tension between professional and organisational orientations (e.g. Briar and Miller 1971, pp. 99-102; Compton and Galaway 1989, pp. 483-484), and sometimes in terms of the worker as change agent in a largely hostile or recalcitrant organisational setting (e.g. Galper 1975, pp. 195-208; Compton and Galaway 1989, pp. 491-494). Both of these conceptions have some value and raise important issues, and are discussed in chapters 8 and 10. However, both views neglect or down-play the interdependence of social and welfare workers and organisations. The systems view of organisations suggests that there is a symbiotic relationship between organisations and workers, that is, their union is either necessary or advantageous to both. It suggests that workers need to view themselves as involved in organisations in a dynamic and interactive way, exercising influence and expecting, in turn, to be influenced by other organisational participants.

Another key element of the systems perspective is its emphasis on organisational needs. In the systems view, organisations are not viewed primarily as rational instruments to achieve specified goals, rather they are social systems which, like biological systems, need to survive, adapt and grow. Systems theorists have identified at a theoretical level the functional requirements (needs) that an organisation must meet in order to survive and grow (Mouzelis 1975, pp. 150-151). These include both external and internal requirements. External needs include the resources to carry out organisational functions (such as facilities, money, consumers) and the sanction of the community. Internal needs include the integration of the elements or units that comprise the

organisation, the loyalty or commitment of personnel, and the technical and political capacity to mobilise and deploy resources.

The idea of organisations having needs has difficulties, which will shortly be discussed. However, the idea is useful for workers in two main ways. Firstly, it suggests some ways that workers can build their influence in organisations. It has been argued that one source of influence for individuals or groups within organisations is their contribution to the functioning of the organisation (Pfeffer 1981, p. 98). If this is so, it follows that if workers wish to extend their organisational influence, one important strategy is to identify organisational needs and endeavour to play a role in meeting these needs. For example, a worker may have skills in group processes which can be used to deal with inter-unit tensions within an organisation. Or a worker may develop skills in submission writing or media relations which could assist the organisation in dealing with its external needs. The reputation and standing acquired in these ways can be drawn on to influence other organisational processes.

An awareness of an organisation's needs also assists workers to understand processes of organisational change. It is often the case that organisational needs for survival and growth are in conflict with the ostensible purposes of the organisation. Organisational activities are shaped, not only, or even mainly in many cases, by formal goals and structures, but also by the 'myriad subterranean processes of informal groups, conflict between groups, recruitment policies, dependencies on outside groups and constituencies, the striving for prestige, community values, the local community power structure, and legal institutions' (Perrow 1986, p. 159). The systems view suggests that organisations, as living, dynamic systems, adapt to these factors and in the process often become diverted from their intended mission.

The last of the key issues raised by the systems perspective is the significance of organisational environment. In the systems perspective, organisations are portrayed as engaging in ongoing exchanges with the other organisations in their environment, taking in resources of various kinds, together with instructions both implicit and explicit, and transforming the resources into goods and services of various kinds (Warham 1977, p. 72). Adapting to the requirements of external groups shapes the goals, structure, culture and services of an organisation in ways that are often disputed, resented or resisted by groups and individuals within the organisation. These processes are examined in detail in chapter 4.

Systems theory provides a more dynamic, complex, holistic picture of organisations than either the human relations or scientific management perspectives. It provides social and welfare workers with important insights into the interconnectedness of organisations, organisational needs and the impact of environmental factors. But it too

has shortcomings. Some writers have argued that the elements that comprise organisations are not necessarily as interdependent as the model suggests. Some parts of an organisation may have a relatively high level of functional autonomy, and may survive quite well even though separated from other parts of the organisation. The level of interdependence in any particular organisation is something to be investigated rather than assumed (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, p. 208). It has also been claimed that the systems view underemphasises the rational and planned aspects of organisations. Many processes in organisations are rationally designed to achieve particular objectives, rather than simply being responses to organisational needs. As was suggested by Weber, this rationality can itself be a force leading to the growth and stability of organisations.

The systems approach can also be criticised for presenting an overly deterministic and reified perspective on organisations. While there may be value in thinking about organisations as if they are organisms with needs to be met, they are not in fact biological entities any more than they are machines or families. 'Organisations do not react to their environment, their members do' (Silverman 1970, p. 37). The actions of individuals in organisations are certainly influenced by their perceptions of the needs and circumstances of the organisation as a whole, as individual interests are bound up with the interests of the overall organisation. But the basic needs or requirements of the organisation can be met in a variety of ways. Different individuals and groups, with differing 'predispositions' (Silverman 1970, p. 36), will adopt a diversity of approaches to meeting these needs with varying consequences and degrees of success.

Finally, it should be noted that systems theory is concerned primarily with issues of integration and interdependence in organisations, rather than with issues of conflict and dissent. There is an underlying assumption that organisations seek to achieve balance and equilibrium, both externally with the environment and internally among the constituent parts of the organisation. This is, at best, only a partial picture of the functioning of organisations. 'An assumed tendency towards the resolution of conflict . . . need not operate if it does not suit the interests of the participants' (Silverman 1970, p. 39). Organisations, and groups within organisations, do not always adjust to changes to increase integration and balance, although extensive, ongoing, unresolved conflict usually has major costs in terms of organisational survival and growth (Bacharach 1983, p. 361).

A recent development in organisation theory, which shares some common themes with systems theory, is the ecological or human ecology model of organisations. In this perspective, organisations are viewed in ways analogous to the analysis of animal life by naturalists or bioecologists (Pugh and Hickson 1989, p. 67). The focus is on the

ways that environments create conditions that result in certain populations of organisations either surviving and thriving or dying out. The theory is mainly concerned with populations of similar organisations, rather than with individual organisations. It examines such issues as the ability of organisations to adapt to changing environmental conditions, the competition for resources in a particular environment, and the 'carrying capacity' of each 'niche' in an environment. The environment is viewed as the main determinant of the kinds of organisations that exist in a particular society.

The ecological model could be applied to attempts to understand the emergence of new types of human service organisations, and the competitive struggle that often occurs among similar organisations in the human services field. For example, the proliferation of publicly funded community-based organisations during the 1970s and early 1980s could be described in terms of favourable environmental circumstances such as an expanding public sector, many gaps in the service network, availability of host organisations to sponsor services, and so forth. It could be argued that as growth in the public sector slows, it will be those organisations most adaptable to changing circumstances that will survive and grow. Hence, organisations able to act in more entrepreneurial ways to take advantage of trends towards the privatisation of human services may be best suited to the environment of the 1990s. The emergence of a new class of private sector human service organisations in niches created by these changed environmental circumstances could be predicted by the ecological model.

The criticisms thlat can be levelled at the ecological model in the context of human services parallel the criticisms of systems theory. Firstly, at a practice level, managers and workers in human service organisations should not be concerned simply with survival and growth of their organisations. For example, there may be important value, policy and political reasons why the members of a community-based organisation would not choose to adapt to the more entrepreneurial climate of the 1990s, preferring to take their chances in a hostile environment. Secondly, ecological theories tend to reify the environment, treating it as a unified whole which acts in some real sense. The alternative view, elaborated on in chapter 4, is that environment is a concept referring to a multiplicity of other organisations and circumstances. Finally, ecological theories tend to be determinist, and to neglect the capacity of organisations to shape and, in some cases, dominate their environment. We conclude with Perrow that systems and ecological perspectives can be useful, provided that 'the disabling assumptions of biology are removed' (Perrow 1986, p. 218).

Decision perspectives

Another way of looking at organisations is as decision-making systems. Decision theories of organisations were first formulated in detail in the late-1940s by Herbert Simon, and important developments in this approach have continued through to the 1980s. The idea of focusing on decisions as a means of understanding organisations has considerable appeal. Many of our experiences of organisations, especially human service organisations, involve decisions. Certainly, social and welfare workers, like many other participants in organisations, make decisions all the time. Should this sole parent be supported in her application for a pension? Should a court order be requested to remove this child from home? Should this young person with a drug dependency be admitted to the treatment programme? Should a recommendation be made for this prisoner to be paroled? Decisions are central in organisational life because of the intended, purposive nature of organisations. 'When people co-ordinate their activities for the attainment of a certain goal, they have continuously to take decisions, to choose among alternatives of action . . . A member of an organisation . . . is a decision-maker and a problem solver' (Mouzelis 1975, p. 123).

The decision perspective aims to elucidate the nature of decision-making in organisations. The importance of this topic for workers is apparent. As social and welfare workers are continually involved in making decisions, it is important for them to understand the nature of the process. Is decision-making in organisations rational, irrational or a mix of the two? What are the influences of organisations on decisions made by organisational members? Do the professional, 'textbook' models of how decisions should be made actually occur?

The decision-making literature is centrally concerned with the question of rationality. Scientific management and bureaucratic theory stress rationality as a central or defining characteristic of organisations. In contrast, human relations and systems theory present a rather more human, complex and messy picture. Decision theory suggests a middle course. It depicts organisations as comprised of individuals who are 'intendedly rational', that is they attempt to arrive at decisions based on clear goals and a comprehensive examination of the range of alternative means to achieve these goals. Complete rationality is, however, an impossibility. This is because individuals do not know the full range of alternative actions available to them, do not know the possible consequences of each alternative, and lack the resources (time, information, and knowledge of the future) to obtain this information. Their rationality is intended but bounded (Hasenfeld 1983, p. 29).

How then do individuals in organisations make decisions? The answer, according to Simon and other decision theorists, is that they develop routines and attempt to simplify.

> . . . they conduct a *limited* search for alternatives along familiar and well-worn paths, selecting the first satisfactory one that comes along. They do not examine all possible alternatives, nor do they keep searching for the optimum one. Rather, they 'satisfice', or select the first satisfactory solution (Perrow 1986, p. 122).

To express it another way, individuals search for decisions that 'will do', rather than for the decision that is 'the best'.

This view raises a number of important questions about the nature of the decisions made by social and welfare workers in organisations. Professional models of practice prescribe a highly rational, often sequential, process of decision-making based on careful analysis of the problem from the consumer's perspective, and goal setting and intervention based on this information and the corpus of professional knowledge (e.g. Compton and Galaway 1979). But how common or typical is this process? Do workers really do what the theory says they should do? Faced with limited time and inadequate knowledge, do workers, like other members of organisations, make do with satisfactory rather than optimal decisions? If so, what influences their idea of what constitutes 'satisfactory'?

On this last question, decision theorists stress the key role of the organisation in determining the premises, or the basic assumptions, of decisions. While workers may be strongly committed to professional, consumer-centred decision-making, this perspective suggests that in actuality the parameters of their decisions are often defined by the organisation. Hasenfeld argues that the espoused models of the professional helping process, as found in the social casework literature, are myth:

> Such a model ignores the fundamental fact that the entire helping process is anchored in an organizational context and that every decision made by the professional is influenced by such organizational variables as program content and structure, consumer eligibility criteria, organizational vocabulary, standard operating procedures, communication patterns, and the interdependencies of units within the organization (1983, p. 30).

The implications of this for workers are challenging and profound. Firstly, the argument, developed in chapter 1, that social and welfare work must be conceptualised as an organisational and a professional activity is underlined. The analysis suggests that workers usually operate in terms of procedures, concepts and criteria that derive from the organisation in which they work as well as from the profession to which they belong. Workers, it is argued, do not typically act as free-standing professionals with freedom to choose their consumers, their approach to defining problems and their therapeutic methods. This is particularly so in organisations where social and welfare workers are not dominant.

The role of the organisation in setting the parameters of workers' decisions is also important in understanding the nature of

organisational control. The Weberian model of bureaucracy suggests that organisations control their participants through rules and commands based on and legitimised through rational–legal authority. Decision theorists add to this an emphasis on 'unobtrusive controls' (Perrow 1986, pp. 128-130). Individuals and groups in organisations are often controlled, not by the blunt and ham-fisted methods of orders and surveillance, but by control of the premises on which decisions are made. If organisations can induce individuals to voluntarily agree or acquiesce in treating certain issues as irrelevant or certain options as impossible, organisational control can be achieved with a high level of efficiency and effectiveness. It is essential for workers to be aware of this form of organisational control, to be able to make calculated and negotiated decisions about the parameters of their activities.

Workers in organisations are involved in making decisions not only about consumers (as discussed above), but also about organisational goals and processes and the allocation of resources. They attend staff meetings, sit on committees and boards of management, and get appointed to working parties to address organisational problems. These kinds of decision-making processes also are the concern of decision theories of organisations. In our experience, social and welfare workers often complain about the apparent irrationality of organisational decision-making processes. Decision theory suggests some of the reasons for this and proposes models of how organisational decisions are made.

One of the most evocative of these is the 'garbage-can' model. According to this model, organisations are often faced with great uncertainty, especially when their goals are vague and conflicting and their techniques are uncertain. In these circumstances, the decision-process resembles a garbage-can into which problems, solutions and interests are tossed, often in quite random ways. For example, funds may become available for a programme that does not of itself have a high priority in terms of consumers' needs, but which provides the opportunity to continue the employment of a valued staff member and to enhance the organisation's ailing public image. For these reasons, the funds are accepted. Over time, the programme becomes quite successful and this leads to organisational resources being channelled to the new programme area. These actions are then justified in terms of the organisation's flexibility in meeting new community and consumer needs.

Decision theories such as the garbage-can model can be criticised for over-emphasising the random, bargained and accidental nature of organisational decisions. In reality, organisations are constrained by such factors as their budget, their environment and their history (ever-present in the form of rules, records, and people with long memories and commitments), and most issues are not up for negotiation and decision-making at any one point in time. As an overall perspective on

organisations, decision theory has other limitations. It does not explain why organisations are structured as they are, and pays relatively little attention to the impact of organisational environment. However, the idea of viewing organisations, and organisational participants such as social and welfare workers, as decision-makers coping as best they can with uncertainty is intriguing and not a little disturbing. It challenges the assumed rationality of such work as portrayed in some texts.

Market perspectives

A contemporary challenge to our implicit theories of organisations has come in the 1980s from economists arguing that we should view organisations from the perspective of free market economics. Expressed in basic terms, this perspective proposes that organisations can be best understood as comprising individuals competitively pursuing their self-interest (for a detailed discussion see Perrow 1986, pp. 219-257). Organisations consist in essence of a series of contracts, and organisational analysis is concerned centrally with the terms, conditions and circumstances of these contracts. On the basis of these propositions, economic analysts have constructed elaborate theories purporting to explain organisational behaviour.

Viewing organisations as marketplaces draws our attention to the role of transactions and individual interests in organisations. From a market perspective, relations within organisations involve economic-like transactions, in which the various parties, each pursuing their individual interests, give and receive benefits. Take the decision by a hospital to employ a social or welfare worker. A market perspective suggests that this decision is taken because it is believed that this will be of benefit to the organisation, or, more particularly, to groups within the organisation. That is, social and welfare workers employed by a hospital may be perceived as assisting other occupational groups, such as doctors, to perform their work more effectively or expeditiously. While the employment of the workers will be presented in terms of their usefulness in providing services to patients, the market perspective suggests that the real explanation is to be found in group and individual interests.

The worker accepting employment in the hospital will also bring a set of expectations to the relationship. At a personal level, the worker may be looking for a steady income, attractive working conditions, security and some status and privileges. Professionally, the worker may desire a relatively high degree of autonomy, the chance to work in his or her field of interest, the opportunity to practise certain kinds of skills or opportunities to supervise other workers. The market perspective suggests that the decision to join and participate in such an organisation is based on a calculation that this is personally worthwhile for some such combination of reasons.

The market perspective views transactions of this kind as the essence of organisational life. Sometimes these transactions take the form of a formalised, written contract, but more often they are implicit relations. They may be long-term, as in the example of the employment contract between a social worker and a hospital, or they may be 'spot' contracts, such as a brief interaction between a worker and a consumer. Individuals have contracts with all other parties that they deal with in the organisation. 'The [organisation] is little more than a bundle of bilateral agreements, free to be broken by any party and freely entered on' (Perrow 1986, p. 223).

The idea of viewing organisations as markets in which individuals pursue their self-interest does not sit comfortably with the personal and professional ideology of most social and welfare workers. Social and welfare workers tend to be uncomfortable with self-interest, particularly their own (we were recently told by the recruiting officer for a large government department that the question graduating social workers conspicuously fail to ask at job interviews is, 'How much will I be paid?'). It is important to recognise, however, that self-interested behaviour is a feature, to a greater or lesser degree, of all organisations. The organisational effectiveness of workers depends in part on their capacity to negotiate effective transactions with other groups and individuals in the organisation, based on a recognition of the interests of all parties concerned.

However, as an overall approach to understanding organisations, the market approach has major limitations. The underlying assumption that people are driven only by self-interest must be challenged. While self-interest obviously motivates everyone to some degree, it is also the case that the behaviour of almost all individuals is motivated to varying degrees by respect and concern for others. It can be further argued that the extent to which individual behaviour in organisations is self-interested or other-regarding is strongly influenced by organisational structures and conditions. Perrow raises the key issue:

> The principal assumption of [market] theory is that people maximize individual utilities, defined as reward (generally monetary) minus effort. I would . . . like to treat this assumption as a variable: Under what conditions will people in organizations maximize their own utilities regardless of the consequences for others, and when will they forgo an increase in utility or even suffer a loss because of the consequences for others? (1986, p. 232).

This is a key point to which we return later in the book. A considerable number of social and welfare workers are involved in organisations such as co-operatives, collectives and community-based organisations that are deliberately structured to enhance behaviour based on co-operation, reciprocity, trust and equality. Many others strive to develop collegial and co-operative relations within

organisations where conditions favour and reward self-regarding behaviour. Reconciling these aspirations with the need to transact effectively with other organisational participants with differing interests and ideologies is a major issue for workers in many contexts.

A further fundamental flaw of the market perspective is its almost total indifference to issues of inequalities of power and resources in organisations. Even if it is accepted that it is useful for some purposes to seeing organisations as accumulations of transactions, it cannot be assumed that the marketplace is free or that participants trade on an even or a fair basis. As we shall see shortly, issues of power, authority and influence are considered by many analysts to be central in organisational analysis, and a perspective that neglects such issues is open to serious criticism.

Table 2.2 summarises the main propositions, issues and practice implications arising from the systems, ecological, decision and market perspectives on organisations. These approaches are similar in so far as they present a picture of organisational life focused on one key concept. Thinking of organisations as organic systems, decision-making mechanisms and sets of transactions adds to our understanding of organisations, provided we recognise the limits and difficulties associated with each approach.

Neo-Marxian perspectives

Marxian sociology had little impact on the study of organisations in the Western world until the 1970s and 1980s. Zey-Ferrell and Aiken argue that this was in large part a result of the kinds of questions dominant in writings on organisations prior to that time. Marxian analysis was not primarily concerned with questions relating to the internal functioning of organisations, or the relations between organisations and their immediate environments. However, 'as organisational analysts have begun to address societal issues of social change, social control, the consequences of domination of powerful economic organisations, class relations, and the like, the Marxian perspective has become increasingly relevant and important' (Zey-Ferrell and Aiken 1981, p. 230). The main strength of the Marxian perspective is its emphasis on the relations between organisations and dominant groups in the society and economy, and the ways in which these shape organisational processes.

Marx's account of the organisational changes that occurred in capitalist societies in the nineteenth century differs markedly from Weber's analysis which we considered earlier. Whereas Weber argued that modern forms of organisation could be understood in terms of the emergence of legal–rational authority, Marx emphasised that modes of organisation, as in, for example, the factory system, developed as means of exploiting and controlling workers and the labour process (Zey-Ferrell and Aiken 1981, pp. 121-122; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980,

Table 2.2 Implications of systems, ecological, decision and market perspectives for social and welfare workers

Propositions	*Questions*	*Practice implications*
	SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVES	
1 The elements and units that comprise an organisation are interdependent and interacting 2 Organisations are social systems with needs (functional requirements) that must be met for survival and growth 3 Relations with the environment are crucial	1 Is interdependence over-emphasised? 2 Are rationality and planning under-emphasised? 3 Is the approach over-deterministic? 4 Is there too much emphasis on integration, and not enough on conflict and dissent?	1 Be aware of interdependence with other organisational participants 2 Be aware of the organisation's 'needs', and of how influence can be acquired by responding to those needs 3 Understand environmental influences on the organisation
	ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	
1 The environment is the main determinant of the kinds of organisations that exist in a society	1 Should survival and growth by adapting to environmental circumstances be the primary consideration? 2 Does the approach neglect the capacity of some organisations to shape their environment?	1 Be aware of the changing nature of the organisational environment, so that decisions can be made about adapting to new circumstances and opportunities
	DECISION PERSPECTIVES	
1 Organisations are decision-making systems 2 Individuals in organisations make satisfactory rather than 'rational' decisions	1 Is the random nature of organisational decision-making over-emphasised? 2 Does the approach fail to account for key factors such as structure and environment?	1 Be aware of 'unobtrusive control' via the premises of decision-making 2 Understand the actual nature of the decision-making process in the organisation

Propositions	*Questions*	*Practice implications*
3 Organisations determine the premises of decision-making		3 Develop skills in making professional decisions in an organisational context
4 Organisational decision-making resembles the 'garbage can' model		
	MARKET PERSPECTIVES	
1 Individuals in organisations pursue their self-interest	1 Are individuals in organisations motivated only by self-interest?	1 Be aware of the role of self-interest in organisations
2 Transactions between individuals are the essence of organisational life	2 Is the organisational marketplace free and fair?	2 Understand the influence of organisational factors on self-interested/other-regarding behaviour
3 The market in organisations is the best means of allocating resources	3 Is the market an efficient and equitable means of allocating of resources	
	4 Does this perspective neglect the central role of power, authority and influence in organisations?	

pp. 33-70). Similarly, in his theory of the state, Marx emphasised the ways in which the state serves the interests of the ruling capitalist class (Mouzelis 1975, pp. 8-11; Etzioni-Halevy 1983, pp. 9-13). Marx viewed the state bureaucracy as an instrument of capital, which would subsequently 'wither away' after the revolution, with the advent of a communist society. This is a different emphasis from Weber, who viewed bureaucracy as a necessary feature of all modern, industrialised societies.

Contemporary Marxian writers similarly emphasise the importance of analysing organisations in terms of their role and place in capitalist society. The defining characteristic of capitalist societies is the private ownership of the means of production. Classical Marxism postulated that private ownership gives rise to two main classes, the owners of the means of production and the workers, whose interests conflict. Contemporary Marxian analysis argues that, although class

relations in modern capitalist societies have become far more complex than this, much social and organisational life can still be explained in terms of the conflicting class interests that stem from the capitalist mode of production (for a brief overview of Marxian and other theories of class see Western 1983, pp. 13-39).

The organisations in which most social and welfare workers are employed are generally not directly involved in economic production. However, neo-Marxians argue that, because human service organisations function within a capitalist system of production, they are structurally constrained to serve the interests of capitalism. Fundamental to this analysis is the argument that because of their dependence on a successful economic base for their existence, their functions are inevitably shaped by the interests of the capitalist system as a whole. Human service organisations, it is argued, serve these interests in a number of ways. They assist the processes of capitalist production and accumulation by ensuring a healthy, educated, and available labour force. They provide legitimacy for capitalist societies by conveying the appearance of a caring and humanitarian society despite the persistence of inequality and poverty. They contribute to the maintenance of the status quo by assisting in the processes of maintaining order and control in society, and through reinforcement of the norms and values of capitalist societies, such as the work ethic. Finally, they tend to reproduce and reinforce in their own hierarchical and non-egalitarian structures the overall patterns of domination in society (Ham and Hill 1984, pp. 32-36; Hasenfeld 1983, pp. 39-40).

This emphasis in neo-Marxist writings on the 'structural constraints' that operate in capitalist societies is an important contribution to the understanding of organisations. While systems theory drew attention to the importance of the immediate organisational environment, the neo-Marxian perspective goes further in emphasising the importance of the overall structural position of organisations in the society and the economy. This emphasis in neo-Marxist writings is not unique. Some systems theorists also focus on the structural position of organisations in society. Katz and Kahn (1966, pp. 111-114) argue that all organisations perform production, maintenance, adaption or management functions for the society as a whole. Health and welfare organisations, in this schema, are primarily concerned with maintenance: they 'help to keep a society from disintegrating and are responsible for the normative integration of society' (Katz and Kahn 1966, p. 112). However, this emphasis on integration and societal needs clearly differs fundamentally from the neo-Marxian perspective. The latter gives us the capacity to go beyond the abstract notion of societal needs to an examination of dominant political and economic interests. Whereas Katz and Kahn say that maintenance organisations are concerned with 'normative integration', a neo-Marxian perspective leads us to ask key questions such as whose norms are being applied to

whom, and with what consequences for the various groups involved? The answers to these questions are complex and disputed. In particular, it should be noted that the neo-Marxian concept of an economically and politically dominant 'ruling class' is challenged by analysts proposing 'elite' and 'pluralist' interpretations of the distribution of political power (for the main issues see Parkin 1980, pp. 268-279).

The issue of the focus and distribution of political power is bound up with the related question of the extent to which structural factors constrain human service organisations and the individuals that work in them. How much autonomy from domination by powerful economic interests do human service organisations have in capitalist societies? This is an important issue. If human service organisations have a significant degree of power in their own right, they, and those that work within them, may well be able to carry out reforms and activities that are in the interests of workers or other groups, albeit within the framework of the capitalist system (Satyamurti 1981, p. 197). A Weberian analysis lends support to the position that large, state, human service bureaucracies tend to accumulate a high degree of power in their own right. 'State agencies derive power from their command of legal, financial and organisational resources and are not merely instruments of capital' (Ham and Hill 1984, p. 187). However, the Weberian perspective rather pessimistically suggests that such bureaucracies then tend to use this power in their own interests. These are complex issues raising fundamental questions about the relationship between economic and political power in capitalist societies.

Neo-Marxian analysts are also concerned with examination of intra-organisational processes. One line of analysis is that organisations are characterised by internal contradictions, and that these contradictions provide the impetus for organisational change and transformation:

> Many theorists see the organization as a reasonably coherent, integrated system, rationally articulated or functionally adjusted. This view . . . is an abstraction. If one looks at the organisation concretely and pays attention to its multiple levels and varied relations to the larger society, contradictions become an obvious and important feature of organizational life (Benson 1981, p. 274).

Benson goes on to argue that contradictions may be generated from within the organisation, or from the larger society, and imposed on the organisation. He gives the example of a prison's dual purpose of rehabilitation and punishment. 'This may produce inconsistent moves within the organisation yielding contradictory structures, competing interest groups, and occasional periods of crisis' (Benson 1981, p. 275). For Benson and other neo-Marxians (e.g. Heydebrand 1980), the interplay of these contradictions is fundamental to the functioning and historical evolution of organisations. This emphasis is consonant with

the perceptions of many social and welfare workers, who often describe their experiences of organisations in terms of contradictions, for example care versus control, openness versus secrecy, professional versus organisational loyalties.

The neo-Marxian perspective is also valuable in drawing our attention to the structural position of workers in human service organisations. In chapter 1 we examined some of the limitations of viewing workers as autonomous professionals, and suggested they should also be viewed as members of organisations. A neo-Marxian analysis suggests that we should also consider their position as workers with class interests. Social and welfare workers are, in most cases, directly or indirectly state employees. As such, in Marxian terms, they are members of the working class or labourers, 'defined by non-ownership of the means of production and paid the equivalent of his or her labour power's value' (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, p. 488). This view raises important issues. It suggests that social and welfare workers share important common interests with all workers, particularly those in the public sector, and with the labour movement generally. In terms of the structural and political location, it implies that social and welfare workers should be affiliated with and active in trade unions, and approach their organisational life and activities from the stance of an employee whose interests are often in conflict with the employing body.

Social and welfare workers should recognise that they are employees, as well as members of organisations and professionals. Each of these three roles shape their position and relations in organisations in different ways. Each can be seen as a source of power, authority and influence; each also has inherent constraints. All three dimensions need to be recognised if workers are to participate effectively in organisations. However, the idea that social and welfare workers share identical interests with all other workers also requires critical analysis. The growth of social and welfare work as an occupation can also be viewed as part of the emergence of a salaried, middle class whose interests are closely bound up with the growth of public sector human services and the existing capitalist structures (Jamrozik 1991, pp. 23-53). It can be argued that this new middle class has its own interests that are not necessarily subordinate to those of capital, other workers, or consumers of human services (Ham and Hill 1984, p. 186; Mishra 1984, pp. 95-96). Such an analysis raises important questions concerning the structural position of social and welfare workers in organisations, and in the society as a whole.

Political economy perspectives

Political economy perspectives share with neo-Marxian writers the view that organisations must be understood in the context of political and economic relations in society as a whole. This perspective also

emphasises the centrality of power relations in the internal structures and processes of organisations (Gummer 1985). A central tenet of this perspective is that an organisation is 'an arena in which various interest groups, external and internal . . . compete to optimise their values through it' (Hasenfeld 1983, p. 44). Some writers refer to these various interest groups as 'stakeholders', that is person or groups who have an investment in the organisation, and have an interest in its operations (Abrahamsson 1977, pp. 117-118). In human service organisations, these may include professional workers, other occupational groups, trade unions, management, consumers, regulatory bodies, funding bodies and interest groups. Social and welfare workers are viewed as one group among many seeking to pursue their values and interests in and through the organisation.

This picture of organisational life has intuitive appeal for many workers, who often experience and interpret organisational life in terms of the conflicting interests and values of the different players. The task of charting a course through the turbulent waters of conflicting personal, professional and organisational interests is a commonplace experience. However, in considering the relevance of this perspective there are two key questions to consider. Firstly, what is meant by 'power', and how is this concept related to other terms such as 'authority' and 'influence'? Secondly, what are the factors that affect the power of groups and individuals in organisations?

The definition of power is a matter of considerable theoretical dispute (Parkin 1980, pp. 263-265). We consider it important to distinguish clearly between the concepts of power, influence and authority. Power refers to capacity to force compliance or to resist a demand for compliance. It is closely linked to the concept of domination. Thynne and Goldring express it thus: 'Power (is) the capacity of a person or persons (A) to achieve a result . . . in the form of action or inaction on the part of another person or other persons (B)' (1987, p. 2).

Influence, by contrast, is the capacity to have an effect on the actions or behaviour of others. It has been suggested that the relationship between power and influence be thought of in terms of a continuum of degrees of power, with influence (low) and domination (high) being the two poles (Thynne and Goldring 1987, p. 2). While this is helpful, we would argue for a sharper distinction with power being reserved for specific circumstances in which one person or group can compel, coerce, constrain—in short, dominate—another. Power is also about the capacity to resist such processes.

Both terms need to be clearly distinguished from authority, the concept encountered earlier in examining Weber's concept of bureaucracy. Authority can be thought of as a distinctive form of power, that is, legitimate or accepted power. Within modern

organisations, the most important source of authority is legal–rationality, that is, the acceptance of known rules, laws and procedures, although the other bases of authority identified by Weber, charisma and tradition, may also be important in particular instances.

It needs to be stressed that the concept of power outlined above is different from the social psychological concept of empowerment currently popular in social and welfare work. The idea of empowerment in therapeutic practice refers essentially to the attainment of self-management competency (Furlong 1987, p. 25); individuals are presumed to be capable of developing a sense of control or power over their lives. By contrast, in political terms, power is held by one person or group over another or others. It is relationship specific, that is, a person is not 'powerful' or 'powerless' in general, but only with respect to other parties in the context of particular social relations (Pfeffer 1981, p. 3).

Another issue is the distinction between exercised power and potential power (Parkin 1980, p. 264). It can be strongly argued that the existence of power does not depend on it actually being exercised. A person or group may have power over others simply as a result of them believing or accepting that certain consequences would follow from acting or not acting in a certain way. An ability to understand and estimate the nature and extent of the potential, or latent, power of individuals and groups within an organisation is an important political skill as this defines the limits of the possible in any given situation.

The complexity of these issues can be illustrated by the case of a hospital social worker. She may well have considerable influence over, say, the nursing and medical staff on the wards in which she works, that is, a capacity to persuade, cajole, educate, and so forth. This influence may extend to the broader hospital around some issues. Her formal authority, in so far as it is based on the established rules of the hospital, is likely to be extremely limited: she may be able to direct the work of subordinate social workers or welfare staff, but she will not be able to exert authority over other staff, such as doctors, ward sisters and nurses, or patients. Indeed, she may well be subject to the authority of these other professionals. Certainly, in the medical treatment of patients her influence will be extremely limited and her authority, in all probability, nil. She may, however, have considerable capacity to shape her own work, and in so far as this has an effect on others this is a significant source of power. For example, she may be able to determine which patients she sees, what actions she will recommend, which organisational projects she will engage in, and so forth. This should be seen as the exercise of power.

A key concern of the power perspective is analysis of the factors which affect the power and influence of individuals and groups in an organisation. In the case of the hospital social worker, what factors

affect her power and influence? Are these factors controlled, to some degree, by the worker herself, or is her power essentially determined by her position in the organisational and social environment?

In making this assessment, it is first important to distinguish clearly between the political nature of social and welfare work as an activity and the level of political power that workers, individually or collectively, can exercise (Adams and Freeman 1980). It can be convincingly argued that social and welfare work is a political activity, both in the sense that the values and commitments of workers influence the performance of their work, and in the sense that such work is inevitably linked to political functions such as social control. However, this is quite different from saying that social and welfare workers are politically powerful. 'The extent to which a job is "political" has no relationship at all to the political leverage the occupants of those jobs can exercise . . .' (Adams and Freeman 1980, p. 448).

What then are the determinants of political power and influence in organisations? Pfeffer suggests that 'the power of organisational actors is fundamentally determined by two things, the importance of what they do in the organisation and their skill in doing it' (1981, p. 98). The first of these factors draws our attention to the importance of structural position and functional relevance. Individuals and groups will have influence, it is argued, to the extent that their activity is important to the organisation. Groups that provide the organisation with legitimacy, that obtain resources for the organisation, that solve organisational problems, or that perform key or critical technical tasks will have a greater capacity for organisational influence (Pfeffer 1981, p. 127; Gummer 1978).

This capacity must, however, be mobilised. Organisational power and influence depend, not only on what a group does, but also on how well it performs its organisational functions. It is also dependent on the perceptions of other organisational actors of the significance of the group's functions and activities. In this sense, power and influence derive from 'the ability of the participants to convince others within the organisation that their specific tasks and their abilities are substantial and important' (Pfeffer 1981, p. 98). Moreover, the political capacities and capabilities of a group will be significant factors. Political resources include group cohesiveness, high morale, good leadership, established networks, developed information sources and a capacity to analyse the organisation in political terms.

Much analysis of organisational power focuses on these two factors: structural position and function, and political skills. As Gummer puts it, any group within an organisation 'must be able to "sell" itself and have something to "sell"' (1978, p. 358). Let us apply these ideas to the previous example of a hospital social worker. As discussed above, the limits to her authority are likely to be tightly drawn. Hence, her capacity to bring about changes in the hospital,

outside of her areas of personal power and discretion, will usually depend on the degree of influence that she can muster. Such influence will depend on the importance of the functions that the worker plays in the hospital and the extent to which social and welfare workers, and no others, can perform these. This may well be problematic. Social and welfare work functions are often not perceived as being as important to hospital functioning as the work of other groups such as surgeons, medical technologists or nurses. Moreover, there is often a perception that social and welfare work tasks can be performed equally satisfactorily by other groups, such as nurses, volunteers and aides. Workers wishing to exert influence in the hospital will have to attempt to portray their activities as valuable to the organisation as a whole. This can be done by undertaking activities that bring prestige to the hospital, or that solve organisational problems, or that bring in or save resources. Moreover, the hospital social and welfare workers as a group will need to develop their political capacities and capabilities to be able to build on and utilise the influence that derives from their importance to the organisation. These strategic considerations present complex dilemmas for workers.

The literature contains many examples of social and welfare workers successfully pursuing strategies of this kind, although often these are not explicitly analysed in political terms. For example, Cleak describes the role of social work in the emergency department of an Australian hospital, showing how social workers developed a significant role in assessment and short-term management of patients' psycho-social needs and problems at the point of entry to the hospital system. The service enhanced the speedy resolution of problems for the patient, contributed to effective utilisation of in-patient beds in the hospital, and gave the social workers the legitimacy and opportunity to be involved in hospital policy issues (1988, pp. 23-28). In a different context, James and Jones describe how a social work service to support victims, witnesses, defendants and their families was developed between 1978 and 1988 in the Victorian Coroner's Court. This was done by convincing the coroner, the police, the Office of Corrections and Community Services Victoria that such a service would contribute to the effective operation of the court, as well as to the well-being of people involved in court proceedings (1988, pp. 31-34). In both of these settings, social workers were apparently successful in negotiating effective roles within the organisation and significantly influencing organisational processes. They achieved this (to re-use Gummer's phrase) by 'selling' themselves and, even more importantly, by having something to 'sell'.

The political power and influence of social and welfare workers, and of all other groups, in organisations is, however, dependent on factors additional to political resources and strategies. Account must also be taken of the context within which power relations occur. Zald suggests that organisations can be thought of as having 'constitutions'

that provide the setting for political processes (1970, pp. 225-229). This constitution which may include, but is not the same as, the written constitution is 'a set of agreements and understandings which define the limits and goals of the (organisation) . . . as well as the responsibilities and rights of participants standing in different relations to it' (p. 225). These understandings, although not fixed, limit the range of matters that are open for negotiation at any particular time within the organisation. These constitutional norms, Zald suggests, 'are deeply embedded in the relationship of an organisation to the society of which it is a part' (1970, p. 27). This observation reminds us again of the neo-Marxian emphasis on the structural constraints on organisations stemming from the dominant power relations in capitalist society.

In some ways, Zald's idea of 'constitutional norms' is somewhat similar to Bachrach and Baratz's concept of non-decision-making in organisations (1980). They suggest that in any given political system, such as an organisation, there is a 'mobilisation of bias' that prevents certain issues from becoming matters of debate. Dominant individuals and groups 'limit decision making to relatively non-controversial matters, by influencing . . . values and political procedures and rituals, notwithstanding that there are . . . serious but latent power conflicts' (1980, pp. 370-371). Bachrach and Baratz, and Zald, are suggesting that to fully understand the distribution of power in an organisation we must look beyond the visible manifestations of power and conflict. We must, they argue, critically examine not only what issues are raised within the organisation, but also which issues are left unexamined. Zey-Ferrell and Aiken suggest that such an analysis should lead us to ask further related questions: How did the existing power relations among groups originate? What classes and groups benefit by the existing relations, and which are disadvantaged? What are the consequences of the present distribution of power in the organisation for present society and future generations (1981, p. 17). While the actions that social and welfare workers can undertake within organisations will be circumscribed by their political resources and skills, their analysis arguably should encompass these broader issues.

Finally, and relatedly, it should be emphasised that the power of individuals and groups within organisations is influenced not only by their political resources and skills, but also by their relationship to the prevailing patterns of social inequality in Australian society. The major dimensions of inequality in Australia are those related to social class, gender, Aboriginality, ethnicity, age, disability and place (Western 1983). These inequalities may be reflected, reproduced, or challenged within organisations. Many of the issues of concern to social and welfare workers in organisations revolve around these social inequalities, and much of their activity involves efforts to promote equitable relations in organisational settings. In this context, it is particularly important to consider the political resources of consumers

of human service organisations, many of whom belong to groups which are relatively powerless in Australian society. The issue of their participation in organisational processes that affect their lives is considered in detail in chapter 9.

Feminist perspectives

Feminist perspectives on organisations are of central and special significance to social and welfare workers. One basic reason for this is that the majority of social and welfare workers are women, as are the majority of consumers of many human service organisations. Feminist writers place this reality at the centre of their analysis, arguing that the roles and relations of workers and consumers to organisations cannot be understood if gender relations are ignored. Gender relations are viewed as central in organisational life, as they are in the broader society. Other perspectives on organisational analysis are criticised for being gender-blind, and failing to consider, or even acknowledge, sexual domination in organisations and society.

Feminist perspectives argue that patriarchal, social, and economic relations, that is, male domination and power over women, permeate society and social institutions and are a basic source of political and social inequality.

> At the heart of feminism is a very simple idea: that there are not two sorts of people in the world . . . the dominant and the subordinate. We are all equal irrespective of our gender. Social relations that obliterate this fact must therefore be transformed and recreated in ways that reflect equality in terms of gender (Dominelli and McLeod 1989, pp. 1-2).

In their analysis of organisations, feminist writers have pointed to numerous ways in which gender structures and influences organisational life (Hooyman and Cunningham 1986; Ferguson 1984; Yeatman 1990). These include the dominant role that men have in senior and managerial positions in organisations, barriers to opportunities for advancement for women workers, the imposition of masculine culture in organisations, discrimination and sexual harassment of women workers, and insensitivity to the needs of women and children as consumers.

A major emphasis in feminist writings has been to show how male-dominated organisations reflect, reinforce and reproduce existing gender relations. Feminist perspectives have also underpinned many reform processes in mainstream (or 'male-stream') organisations that aim to restructure gender relations. For example, 'femocrats' have played a central role in the introduction and implementation of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation (Yeatman 1990). Feminist writers and workers have also attempted to articulate and create alternative organisations, based on fundamentally different

assumptions from mainstream organisations. Many of these organisations are 'women only' and are concerned with issues such as women's health and domestic violence. The structures and processes developed in these contexts pose important questions for all organisations, and these are considered in chapter 6.

Hooyman and Cunningham (1986) identify six main themes in feminist perspectives on working in organisations. In the first theme, there is an emphasis on the need to value women's perspectives and experiences. Female values that are seen as important for organisations include flexibility, capacity for intuitive awareness, empathy and nurturance (p. 167). It has been argued that women can be agents for transformational changes in organisational and managerial life, because of the values and qualities that they bring (Gummer 1990, pp. 112-115).

In the second theme, a feminist perspective involves a questioning of false dichotomies such as expert–non-expert, professional–non-professional, worker–consumer. Hooyman and Cunningham argue that these distinctions are often used to keep consumers separate and powerless, and they argue for a more holistic approach to defining and addressing problems, that integrates many different perspectives (p. 168).

The third theme is a re-conceptualisation of power. Although concepts of domination are central to feminist social analysis, there is an emphasis on attempting to create different kinds of power relations in organisations based on ideas of empowerment:

> In a feminist model, power is facilitative; empowerment to action occurs rather than domination. Personal power is then political, allowing people the ability to make decisions for themselves and to achieve self-determination and control over their own lives rather than over the lives of others (Hooyman and Cunningham 1986, p. 169).

The fourth theme is closely related to this theme as it emphasises democratic organisational structures. Feminist writers stress the need to modify organisational structures to facilitate empowerment of workers and consumers. Key elements of feminist structures include minimal hierarchy, fluid definitions of roles and responsibilities, rotation of tasks, accountability to peers, sharing of skills and consensual decision-making (Hooyman and Cunningham 1986, p. 170). Bureaucratic structures are viewed as male-based models of organisation and administration.

The fifth theme deals with the central emphasis in feminism on the importance of organisational process as well as product or output. Feminist values in management emphasise the need to deal with people as individuals, to respect individual's feelings, to deal with conflict as it arises, and to take the time to develop strong relationships among people who are working together. 'The feminist model is developmental, concerned with long-run effectiveness and the

processes necessary to attain it, rather than only with short-term efficiency' (Hooyman and Cunningham 1986, p. 170). Feminist perspectives also emphasise the need for processes to reflect social goals. 'If feminists aim to create egalitarian social relations then these must be reflected in their practice' (Dominelli and McLeod 1989, p. 9).

The sixth theme deals with the feminist perspectives' emphasis on the need to draw links between the experiences of individuals, organisations and underlying social conditions. The expression 'the personal is political' encapsulates this theme. The connections between the experiences of women in particular organisations and patriarchal relations in the broader society are emphasised. The necessity of changing underlying social conditions as well as their manifestation in particular organisational contexts is stressed.

Feminist approaches to organisational analysis pose significant challenges to the perspectives that have been examined in this chapter. They question the values underlying the formal objectivity and impersonality of the bureaucratic model, and stress the role of bureaucratic organisations in maintaining patriarchal structures. They reject the detachment and focus on outcomes alone of the scientific management perspective. There are some commonalities with human relations in the emphasis on personal and inter-personal factors in organisational life. However, feminism, unlike much writing from the human relations perspective, is not managerialist in focus. Feminist views reject the emphasis in the market perspective on 'transactions' and self-interest, and stress the potential for creating relations of mutuality and sharing in organisations.

The relations between feminist perspectives and neo-Marxist views of organisations are complex. There is an extensive debate within feminism over the relationship between social divisions based on gender and other social divisions such as class (Dominelli and McLeod 1989, pp. 6-7). Many feminist writers acknowledge the contribution that radical and neo-Marxist perspectives have made to an understanding of the role of state organisations, but are critical of the lack of attention to the nature of women's experiences and gender questions in general. They are also critical of the lack of attention to the personal in neo-Marxist analysis: 'in failing to render a gender-specific account of dependency and caring, it has not . . . broached the question of how to develop a practice addressing the suffering of women, who form the majority as clients, carers and social workers' (Dominelli and McLeod 1989, p. 15).

Feminist perspectives share with the political economy approach an analysis of organisations in terms power relations, but object to the neglect of gender relations by many writers. The feminist emphasis on empowerment of individuals and groups differs from the more instrumental view of power, authority and influence of writers in the political economy tradition.

Feminist emphases on process and self-determination are themes held in common with the Aboriginal perspective on organisations, discussed below. Yeatman argues that femocrats, that is, women holding senior positions in state administration, have played a significant role as a brokers and mediators of the claims of groups such as Aboriginal people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds around issues to do with inclusion and exclusion from mainstream organisations (1990, p. 90).

Feminist perspectives on organisations raise key issues for both men and women workers. We would argue that it is as important for men to come to grips with feminist perspectives on organisations as it is for women. Men involved in social and welfare work need to be aware of the centrality of gender in organisational relations. Moreover, there is a convincing argument that men's interests as human beings, particularly their opportunities and capabilities for emotional engagement, are not served by patriarchal social relations. The increasing attention being paid to men's issues and the nature of masculinity is opening up important, additional perspectives on gender analysis.

Another central issue raised by the feminist perspective is the relations between different groups and classes of women. Although the feminist perspective stresses that gender pervades all social relations, women's individual circumstances are also shaped by their class position, their race and ethnicity, their geographic location and so forth. Yeatman suggests that this has been a particular dilemma for femocrats who attempt 'to speak on behalf of all women when their practical ideological commitments often best express the interests of women who like themselves are positioned within full-time primary labour markets' (1990, p. 81). This dilemma can also be understood in terms of the neo-Marxian perspective on the development of the 'new middle class', and its relations to state structures (Jamrozik 1991).

It is important to note that feminism differs from many of the other perspectives we have examined in that it seeks to link analysis and action. It also requires a personalised, rather than an analytically detached, response to organisational issues. It encompasses a framework for understanding the nature of organisations and a political agenda for organisational change.

Aboriginal perspectives

Aboriginal perspectives on organisations, unlike the other perspectives we have examined, are not based on a literature concerned with theoretical reflection on the nature of organisations, although there is a developing body of significant writings. However, in the Australian context it is vital to state that there is a distinctive Aboriginal view of organisations, and that social and welfare workers must be aware of

this. This perspective is grounded in Aboriginal history, including the history of relations with non-Aboriginal people, and in particular the relations between Aboriginal people and state organisations.

This history is one of colonisation, dis-empowerment and dis-possession. Between 1788 and 1900 the population of Aboriginal people was reduced from approximately 750 000 to 100 000 as a result of introduced diseases, expropriation of land, and killings (Mulvaney and White 1987). Many Aboriginal people were gathered by force and herded into missions. Many found their traditional lands turned into pastoral leases, their presence tolerated solely as a source of cheap labour (Reynolds 1987).

During the twentieth century this systematic and deliberate dis-empowerment has continued. What began with the dis-possession of land has been extended to all other aspects of life. Aboriginal people were made dependent upon others for food, clothing, education, housing and health care. 'Decisions were made about them and for them and imposed upon them' (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, vol. 1, p. 9). The consequences have been appalling. Charles Perkins summarised the position as follows:

> ...Aboriginal people, by any measure, are the most deprived and impoverished section of Australian society. Forgotten — or ignored — are these condemning statistics:
>
> • the average Aboriginal life expectancy is 20 years less than that for other Australians;
>
> • Aboriginal infant mortality is nearly three times that of non-Aboriginal Australians;
>
> • trachoma is seven times more prevalent among Aboriginal people [than in the general population];
>
> • Aboriginal unemployment is five time higher than the national average;
>
> • on average Aboriginals earn only half that of other Australians;
>
> • a large proportion of Aboriginal families live in sub-standard housing and temporary shelters made from scrap iron and timber, and
>
> • Aboriginal imprisonment rates are up to 16 times higher than for other Australians (Perkins 1986, p. 2).

Relations between Aboriginal people and mainstream organisations are graphically portrayed in the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Between January 1980 and 31 May 1989, ninety-nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died in the custody of prison, police or juvenile detention institutions. The circumstances of their deaths were varied, but in every case the victims' Aboriginality played a significant or dominant role in their incarceration and death (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, vol. 1, p. 1). The Royal Commission's report demonstrates how Australian society, its institutions and organisations, have historically oppressed Aboriginal people, marginalising and

excluding their needs and aspirations from the mainstream political agenda. This process has been described as one of 'institutional racism'. By this is meant:

> . . . a pattern of distribution of social goods, including power, which regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and racial groups and disadvantages others. It operates through key institutions: organised social arrangements through which social goods and services are distributed. These include the public service, the legal and medical systems, the education system (Pettman 1986, p. 7).

Many commentators argue that contemporary changes in policy and terminology have had little impact on this pattern of relations. Policies of 'self-determination' have been developed as attempts by governments to 'recognise the unique position of Aboriginal people in Australia and to provide them with an effective basis for achieving real control over their own lives' (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, vol. 2, p. 159). However:

> The perception of many Aboriginal people . . . is that too often policies are propounded, programmes put forward, assistance offered in a form which has been largely pre-determined in the bureaucracies of the departments concerned; that there is a process of consultation with relevant Aboriginal communities or bodies but that the parameters of the consultation have been set in advance; that the agenda is being fixed by non-Aboriginal people, not by Aboriginal people (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, vol. 1, 1991, p. 20).

Other studies have concluded that in contemporary society, Aboriginal people are as controlled by welfare organisations as they ever have been in the past, despite the superficial appearance of control of their own affairs (Collman 1988, p. 13)

The failure of mainstream organisations to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people, has led to the establishment of Aboriginal-controlled organisations (Perkins 1986). It is to these organisations and services that many Aboriginal people look to address their needs. The Royal Commission wrote of these organisations:

> The variety is endless, the energy is enormous. Some of course, fail. What is surprising is not that some fail but that so many keep going and even those that run down often come up again. All of these are dedicated in their own way to the empowerment of Aboriginal people, to raising self-esteem, demonstrating the ability to exercise control of their own affairs, attacking the legacy of the past (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, vol. 1, p. 17).

The Aboriginal perspectives on organisations arises out of these various experiences with non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal organisations (these experiences are documented in detail in Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991). The perspective is not couched in the accepted academic language of organisational theory, as this

language is itself embedded in the political agenda of the dominant culture. Even words such as social justice, access, equity, equality, rights and participation are not culturally neutral, and when applied uncritically by non-Aboriginal organisations and workers to Aboriginal people constitute a form of cultural dominance. The Aboriginal view emphasises that the processes of self-determination are as important as outcomes, and that processes and outcomes must be measured in Aboriginal terms. The demands are for land rights, control and self-determination, compensation for past wrongs and a treaty to map out a new future. As one Aboriginal writer states:

> Blacks resent the child/ward status implicit in the continued denial of resources and remain embittered by the fact that these resources are, or stem from, their heritage and birthright—the land—stolen by the colonists two hundred years ago (Sykes 1989, p. 230).

It is crucial that social and welfare workers struggle to understand the Aboriginal view of Australian history, and the perspective on the role of the state, its institutions and organisations that flows from Aboriginal experience. The evidence demonstrating the failure of the majority of non-Aboriginal organisations to understand and respond effectively to the needs of Aboriginal people is irrefutable. Coming to grips with the Aboriginal perspective is, in the Australian context, a vital task for social and welfare workers, and a fundamental challenge to non-Aboriginal organisations. Developing such an understanding is an essential part of gaining a critical perspective on organisations.

Developing a 'critical' perspective

All of us, as a consequence of our daily contact with organisations as employees, consumers, members or simply observers, acquire ideas about what organisations are like, how they work, and what can be expected of them. In addition, our ideas about organisations are shaped by the media, by educational experiences, and by the experiences of others including family and friends. These ideas can be thought of as our received or implicit theories of organisations.

Our beliefs about organisations are also strongly influenced by organisations themselves. All organisations, to varying degrees, attempt to positively construct community perceptions (and the self-perceptions of their members) in ways that will enhance the organisation's fortunes. Gouldner has pointed out that one important aspect of this process is that organisations 'inhibit the flow of certain kinds of information about themselves, in short, they have secrets' (1963, p. 161). Social and welfare workers need to be able to question and challenge 'official' versions of the nature of organisations, as well as their own 'received' beliefs.

Table 2.3 Implications of neo-Marxian, political economy, feminist and Aboriginal perspectives for social and welfare workers

Propositions	*Questions*	*Practice implications*
	NEO-MARXIAN PERSPECTIVES	
1 Organisational structures and processes are centrally concerned with domination and control 2 Organisations operate within the structural constraints of capitalism 3 Organisations are characterised by internal contradictions 4 Employer–employee relations are central to organisational processes	1 Are capitalist societies dominated by a ruling class? 2 What are the limits of structural constraints? 3 Does the idea of contradictions encompass the diversity of interests in organisations? 4 What is the nature of class conflict within organisations?	1 Be aware of the structural constraints and relative autonomy of the organisation 2 Understand the impact of dominant political and economic interests on the organisation, and your relation to those interests 3 Understand the implications of being a worker (employee) in an organisation
	POLITICAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVES	
1 Organisations are political arenas in which stakeholders seek to maximise their values 2 Power, influence and authority must be clearly distinguished 3 It is important to distinguish between exercised and potential power 4 The determinants of organisational power include position and function, political skills and structural context	1 How much of organisational life can be understood in political terms? 2 To what extent is the political arena in organisations structured and biased? 3 How do patterns of social inequality affect power relations in organisations?	1 Be aware of the political nature of organisations 2 Understand the sources of power, influence and authority 3 Develop the skills to increase political capability and capacity 4 Develop sensitivity and skills in promoting equitable relations in organisations

Propositions	*Questions*	*Practice implications*
	FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES	
1 Gender relations are central to an understanding of organisations	1 What are the implications of a gender analysis for men and women workers?	1 Workers should be sensitive to gender issues in their practice in organisations
2 Women's experiences of organisations should be valued	2 How does a gender analysis deal with the issue of differences among women, including differences of class, race, ethnicity, and location?	2 Workers should be aware of the importance of process as well as outcomes
3 Process is as important as product	3 What are the links between the feminist perspective and the other perspectives we have examined?	3 Workers should seek to understand the links between the personal and the political
4 Democratic structures should be fostered to facilitate empowerment of workers and consumers		4 Workers should be aware of how gender relations structure dependency and consumer roles
5 The personal is political		
	ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES	
1 Institutional racism operates through key institutions and organised social arrangements	1 To what extent are organisations reflective of the interests of culturally dominant groups?	1 Be aware of how organisational processes are culturally bound and may dominate, marginalise or exclude certain groups
2 Self-determination and control are central to the Aboriginal perspective on organisations	2 How can non-Aboriginal organisations relate more effectively to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people?	2 Be aware that consultation is not the same as control and self-determination
3 Key concepts such as social justice, effectiveness and so on should be defined and measured in Aboriginal terms in the Aboriginal context	3 Does this require acceptance of different processes and outcomes than for others in the society?	3 Workers and organisations need to understand and accept the validity of Aboriginal definitions of desirable organisational processes and outcomes

As we have seen, organisation theory provides workers with many different perspectives from which to analyse the organisations in and through which they work. These perspectives provide a basis for re-appraisal of 'received' and 'official' ideas about organisations, and the development of a critical perspective. None of the approaches that we have examined provides an unambiguous, all-embracing framework for understanding organisations that can be adopted holus-bolus. The issue for workers is not primarily that of choosing among perspectives. Rather, the analytical process is one of developing an integrated approach to the understanding of organisations, based on a critical appraisal of organisation theory and experience of organisational life. This integrated approach should comprise ideas about the nature of organisations, the factors that influence organisational structures, processes and behaviour, and the implications for social work practice.

To assist in this process, we have summarised in Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 the main propositions, issues and practice implications raised by each of the perspectives that we have analysed. In Table 2.4 we pull some of the main themes of the chapter together in the form of a checklist of key questions for organisational analysis. This list can be used by workers wanting to critically examine, at a general level, their own organisational context. All of the issues raised are examined in more detail in later sections of the book; indeed, the book as a whole can be viewed as our critical analysis of human service organisations. The checklist should be viewed as a practice tool designed to provide a means of systematically applying the theoretical writings on organisations presented in this chapter to a practice context. We suggest that this exercise be undertaken as a way of grounding and reflecting on the material presented in the chapter.

Our own approach to organisational analysis centres on the political economy perspective. We view organisations as comprising individuals and groups with competing and often conflicting interests, existing within the broader political and economic structure. This perspective is fundamental to our analysis throughout the book. In particular, we emphasise the need for workers to analyse their own sources of power, authority and influence. We see this as basic to effective organisational work. Similarly, the political position of consumers in organisations needs to be carefully analysed as part of any process to improve organisational responsiveness to their needs.

Our overall approach, however, is influenced by many of the other perspectives outlined and critiqued in this chapter. We view the bureaucratic nature of modern organisations, as outlined by Weber, as the starting point for organisational analysis. Scientific management's concerns with efficiency and effectiveness, and its contemporary manifestation in 'managerialism', cannot be accepted uncritically. We examine this perspective closely in chapter 11. However, we readily accept the importance of efficiency and effectiveness in organisations

Table 2.4 Checklist of key questions for organisational analysis for social and welfare workers

1	What is the nature and basis of authority in the organisation?
2	What are the formal structures and processes?
3	What informal processes and relations are important?
4	What are the organisation's needs for survival and growth?
5	What are the patterns of inter-dependency among members and units?
6	What are the main environmental influences?
7	What is the nature of the decision-making processes?
8	Does the organisation tend to promote self-interested or other-regarding behaviour?
9	What are the structural constraints on the organisation?
10	Which are the main stakeholders, and what are their interests and values?
11	What are the sources and distribution of power, influence and authority? How might workers utilise power, influence and authority in organisations?
12	How are major social inequalities, in particular those based on class, gender, location, ethnicity and race, reproduced or challenged within the organisation?
13	What are the implications of this analysis for workers in their different roles as organisational members, professionals and employees?

providing human services to consumers, and the relevance of formal structures and processes. The emphasis in the human relations perspective on the informal, personal and inter-personal elements of organisational life are also incorporated into our analysis.

We have drawn on writers from the systems and ecological perspectives in terms of our emphases on the influence of environmental factors on organisations, and the importance of inter-dependencies among organisational participants. The market perspective draws our attention to the pervasive influence of self-interest in organisations, although we do not accept that organisations are simply collections of transactions between groups and individuals. Nor do we believe that organisations must be built around market-like relations; we are interested in the potential of alternative organisations based on values of mutuality, equality, openness and trust. Decision perspectives have been particularly influential in shaping our ideas about how organisations seek to exercise control over front-line workers.

Neo-Marxian perspectives have shaped our understanding of the structural constraints on human service organisations, and the relative

autonomy of state organisations. They also show how conflicts within organisations reflect broader class interests in the overall society. Human service organisations perform specific functions in the society, economy and polity, and awareness of these is fundamental to organisational analysis and understanding. Similarly, an awareness of gender-based divisions in society, and the ways that these are produced, reinforced, reproduced and challenged in and through organisations is essential. We have attempted to incorporate such understanding drawn from feminist perspectives into our analysis. We do not claim to present an Aboriginal perspective on organisations. However, we have attempted to incorporate an awareness that there exists a distinct Aboriginal perspective on the questions and issues we examine.

Finally, underpinning our analysis is a belief that human service organisations are of central importance in the struggle to promote a socially just society. Our analysis is based on the belief that the attempt to pursue the social justice agenda of access, equity, equality, rights and participation for all citizens in and through human service organisations is possible, worthwhile and of fundamental importance.

Chapter review questions

1 Why do workers need a critical perspective on organisations? How can a worker develop a critical perspective on organisations?
2 What is meant by the term 'bureaucracy'? How can the bureaucratisation of modern society be explained?
3 Does the scientific management perspective on organisations have any contemporary relevance for social and welfare workers and human service organisations?
4 Do you agree with those writers in the human relations school who argue that organisational structures and processes should be developed to meet the social and psychological needs of workers? Why or why not?
5 Is it helpful to apply systems and ecological theory to the analysis of organisations? Consider this question in relation to the role of social and welfare workers in organisations.
6 What is meant by 'bounded rationality' in organisations? How is this relevant to social and welfare work?
7 What, if anything, is wrong with thinking about an organisation as a marketplace where individuals engage in transactions and negotiations in pursuit of their interests?
8 To what extent are human service organisations constrained by the structural requirements of the capitalist economy and society?

9 Social and welfare workers can be seen to relate to organisations in three main ways: as employees, as members of the organisation, and as professionals. What differences stem from viewing workers in each of these ways?
10 How powerful and influential can social and welfare workers in organisations be? How powerful and influential should they seek to be?
11 What are the differences between power, influence and authority?
12 What are the main elements of a feminist perspective on organisations?
13 What is your understanding of an Aboriginal perspective on organisations?

Further reading

Detailed accounts of the development of organisation theory, including the perspectives discussed in this chapter, can be found in Clegg and Dunkerley 1980, Mouzelis 1975, and Perrow 1986. Perrow's account is particularly lively and interesting. More summary accounts can be found in Hasenfeld 1983, pp. 12-49 and Perrow 1976. Hasenfeld's account focuses on human service organisations. Warham 1977, pp. 63-92 discusses some of the developments described in this chapter in relation to social work. A critical perspective on organisations is outlined in Zey-Ferrell and Aiken 1981, pp. 1-21. Feminist perspectives are outlined in Hooyman and Cunningham 1986, Yeatman 1990 and Ferguson 1984. An Aboriginal perspective is presented by Sykes 1989. See also the analysis in Bennett 1989. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, vol. 2 provides a detailed analysis of the issues underlying relations between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal organisations.

Case study

WELCOME TO THE ORGANISATION

Peter Madison waited expectantly for the session to start. He had graduated just two months earlier from the Whitlam University School of Social Work and Community Welfare Studies, and applied for a job as a child protection worker with the State Department of Community and Family Services. At the time, the department was experiencing a severe shortage of trained workers, due mainly to high turnover rates in the child protection area. Peter was immediately offered a position in an inner suburban area office of the department. He had started work two days ago. Today was day one of the

three-day orientation programme provided for new graduate members of the department. The opening session, according to the timetable that had been distributed to the dozen or so social work, community welfare and psychology graduates who had by now assembled in the seminar room, was simply entitled 'A welcome to the organisation from the Deputy Director-General (Corporate Support and Services)'. A well-dressed, confident-looking woman entered the room and sat at the table at the front of the room, and the session began.

'On behalf of the Minister for Community and Family Services and the Director-General, I would like to extend to all of you a most sincere and warm welcome to the department. My name is Jill Johnson and I am the Deputy Director-General (Community Support). My colleague, who has responsibility for corporate support and services, was due to speak with you this morning, but he has been called by the Minister to assist with some pressing issues. I am very happy to step in for him. The Minister, and all of us in the Senior Executive Management Group, place a very high value on these orientation programmes. The department is entering into an extremely exciting and challenging period of growth and development, and we are conscious that it is the quality of our front-line workers that will, in the last analysis, determine whether or not we are able to meet the demanding goals we have set for ourselves as an organisation. Your commitment to the department and its goals is a key factor, and I personally am looking forward to talking with you about what we, as a department, can achieve together.

I feel I should begin by dealing with some of the misconceptions about the department that, in our experience, new graduates sometimes bring with them. While this may sound rather unduly negative, I believe that I do need to acknowledge that in the past the department has had an image problem in some sections of the community, perhaps most notably out at Whitlam University. Some schools and departments out there (I won't name them, but some of you have been closely connected with them for the past four years) persist in portraying this department as a conservative, hierarchical, irrational, impersonal, oppressive bureaucracy, that is hostile to the exercise of professional skills. I guess that what I want to do this morning, above all else, is to say that this is an outdated view. Whatever the department may have been like in the 1960s and 1970s, I can tell you that today it is striving to become a highly professional, caring, effective, service-oriented organisation. I personally have a background as a social worker, and I have found the department a highly rewarding and enjoyable place of employment. We are far from perfect, of course, but I can assure you that you are now part of a group of people dedicated to making a positive contribution to the social development of our state.

Let us take each of the five areas of criticism often levelled at the department, and compare them with the actual situation. Firstly, it is still sometimes said that the department is motivated by a conservative ideology. To destroy this myth, I think I need only refer you to the Departmental Goals

Statement that you will find in your folder. You will see there that as part of our new corporate plan, we have defined our goals as follows:

1 To increase the capacity and capability of families to provide care responsibly for their members;
2 to provide high quality environments which provide opportunities and security for children whose parents have been unable to care for them;
3 to increase the capacity of local communities to respond effectively to their own social needs;
4 to generate opportunities for young offenders and other young people requiring assistance and opportunities to participate appropriately in the community.

All departmental programmes and activities are oriented towards the purposes and philosophy stated in these goals. Naturally, there is plenty of room for discussion about the ways in which these goals will be pursued, and the work that can be done is always subject to the availability of resources. However, I am sure you will agree that our broad direction is positive and forward-looking, and we are sure that it has the backing of the community as a whole.

But what about the claim that we are hierarchical and bureaucratic? Again, I believe I can readily demonstrate to you that this is another outdated myth. The department has recently undergone a major re-organisation to ensure that our structures and procedures are appropriate to our tasks and circumstances. In place of the traditional hierarchy, we have adopted regionalisation, combined with a matrix style management structure and extensive lateral linkages. This has given us a remarkably 'flat' organisational structure. I understand that the organisational structure is to be discussed in detail this afternoon by John Simpson, the Director of Organisational Services. I will just say that the structure has been designed to facilitate good communication up, down and across the organisation, and to decentralise decision-making. We simply do not have a traditional hierarchical structure. We believe strongly in a participative management style. You can expect to be involved in decision-making in your area office or specialist unit from day one, and innovative ideas and suggestions are always welcome.

This brings me to discuss the suggestion that this is an impersonal organisation. I find this a particularly offensive suggestion. Of course, we are a big and busy organisation, and the personal needs of staff can sometimes be neglected. However, we believe that as a human service organisation we have special responsibilities to take a lead in personnel matters. We believe that people matter, and that people who are contented are productive workers. All of our managers are required to take special training in people management, and there is an open-door policy on people matters. This means that if you have concerns or problems in the job, or matters that are affecting your work performance in any way, your manager is available to talk the issue through. All units and offices have regular staff meetings and your contribution to problem-solving and organisational development is welcome.

There are also regular informal functions and plenty of opportunities to mix socially with other staff, if you choose to do so. While I am on the subject, we very much hope that you will all be able to join us for the lunch planned for tomorrow, where we will be joined by staff from around the department. We think of ourselves more as a big extended family than as a bureaucratic machine—so, welcome to the family!

Another criticism that sometimes comes our way is that we are an irrational organisation, prone to inconsistencies and political in-fighting, and not always in control of our decision-making. In the 'old' department, if I may use that term, this was certainly an issue. However, we now have systems in place to ensure a high level of rationality and efficiency. One of the key elements of this three-day orientation session is to introduce you to the operation of these systems. The department has recently completed the introduction of a programme management and budgeting system, including comprehensive performance indicators. This system works in tandem with our new management information system, which ensures that comprehensive records are kept on programmes, budgets, personnel, community needs, and consumers. All workers are required to keep records of their consumer work and other activity, according to our established forms and procedures. Training in these procedures will, of course, be provided. We see computer technology as a tool to assist us to achieve the efficiency and cost effectiveness that is required of a modern, accountable public service department.

Some critics of the department see these systems that I have been talking about as evidence of the essentially oppressive nature of the department. This again is nonsense, although clearly any planning and data management system needs adequate safeguards. You will find that we rely heavily on, and encourage the exercise of, your professional skills and judgement, within the broad context of departmental policies. You will also find that we are respectful of the rights of consumers. While we do have wide powers of intervention in family life in certain circumstances, we are aware of the need to exercise these powers carefully and responsively.

In conclusion, I draw your attention to the departmental symbol, a person inside a diamond shape. The four sides of the diamond represent the key elements of our social care strategy: the individual, the community, the family and the department. It is the partnership amongst these four elements that will result in sound social development. My talk this morning, and the sessions you will attend over the next few days, are designed to give you the understanding of this organisation that you need to work effectively with us, and with our partners in social development. Welcome again. Are there any questions?'

Key questions

What does this speech convey to Peter Madison and the other new workers about the nature of the organisation? Are there any key questions or issues

that appear to have been omitted or misrepresented, or any misplaced emphases? How might Peter and the other workers proceed to develop their own critical analysis of the organisation?

Case discussion points

1 What questions, if any, would you ask the Deputy Director-General? Why or why not?
2 What other sources of information, if any, about the organisation should be accessed? How?
3 Analyse the deputy Director-General's speech from each of the perspectives on organisational analysis discussed in this chapter.